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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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12/17/99

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->From the Editor's Keyboard  
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"Saying it like it is!"

Finish your holiday shopping yet? I have just two more things that I need to find and I'll be all done! I'm ecstatic! I'm never done, or even this close to being finished, this early! Even all of our holiday cards have been sent out! Wrap up the gifts this weekend, grab the last couple of gifts (and sneak in one or two more for my wife and I), and we're ready to go.

It certainly doesn't look or feel like Christmas, weather-wise, but you won't hear me complaining. I won't be upset if we get a dusting of snow on Christmas eve, as long as it melts over the weekend. What's the holiday without some white on the ground? <g>

Not too much going on in the news this week as businesses are winding down for the holidays and likely getting ready for Y2K contingency plans. We here at A-ONE are winding down our first year of publishing. I'm amazed that, by the end of the year, we'll have published 44 issues! Joe and I weren't sure how long the magazine would last, or how much interest it would generate. But, our readers have been extremely supportive! And, we continue to attract new readers every week. For that, we'd like to express our gratitude. We're looking forward to 2000 in which we hope to flourish even more. Thanks for reading!

Until next time...

Atari Today
(UK Paper Magazine)

From: "Bob F" <BobF@techsoftware.demon.co.uk>

Hi,

The first edition of Atari Today, a UK paper magazine for all Atari users is scheduled for release in January. The magazine will be priced at around 2.50 and will include a cover disk, and optional CD-ROM. Details on ordering, etc. will be posted in January together with our new web site.

Atari Today is a short format magazine (16-20 pages), but will be packed with news, reviews and information from the world of Atari. We want to keep it interesting, and up-beat.

We are currently looking for the following:

1. The Fastest Atari on the Planet.
If you think you are running the fastest Atari derived computer on the planet. Get in touch - we'd like to feature you in Atari Today. Your computer must use an original Atari main-board, but can involve any kind of acceleration, etc.
2. The Fastest Atari Clone.
As above but using a non-Atari main board.
3. Developers
If you are a developer for Atari software - let us know. We would like to feature at least 1 developer in each issue.
4. Artists/Musicians

If you use your Atari/Clone to create music and/or pictures
we would like to hear from you.

5. Atari Clubs

If you are involved in or run an Atari club, please get in touch.

Thanks

Bob F

Atari Today.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Christmas is only a week away
now.... I guess that I'd better START my Christmas shopping, huh? <g>

Actually, I'm on vacation this coming week, so I'll have plenty of time
to do it then. That's why I've put it off for so long. I had the same
week for vacation last year, and it really worked out quite well. The
malls and shopping centers weren't anywhere near as bad as I had
expected them to be, and I was able to get everything done well ahead of
schedule.

Normally I try to have the intro to this column have something to do
with the Atari world, but this week I'm not even going to try. Instead,
I'm going to talk about a television show.

At the beginning of this television season, I saw several commercials
for a new show called "The West Wing". I wasn't impressed because it
looked like another exploitative show, this time based on the goings on
within government in general, and The White House in particular. Add to
that the fact that I've never cared for Martin Sheen or the characters
he's played, and I had all the reason I needed to avoid this particular
show.

My wife, however, decided that, since John Spencer one of the actors, it
would be worth watching. (John Spencer was the soldier who couldn't
"turn the key" in the movie "War Games" and a rough-and-tumble lawyer in
"L.A. Law").

To my great surprise, I liked the show. I liked the general message, I
liked the characters, and I even liked Martin Sheen in it. I haven't
missed an episode since.

This past week, one of the characters finds out that a homeless veteran
of the Korean war died on the national mall (that strip of land between
the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial with the big
rectangular reflecting pool). He's never met the man, is not related to
him, and has nothing except military service in common with him. Yet he
uses his influence to arrange a military funeral for the homeless man
and meets several more homeless people in the process.

What struck me as so interesting about this particular show was not that a White House aide could actually do something caring and compassionate (I hear that SOME of them ARE actually warm blooded <grin), but that a television show actually pointed out that there are homeless people in Washington DC. Normally, if a story has something to do about homelessness, it takes place in New York or Los Angeles. Shows tied to other cities normally avoid the subject all together.

The heck of it is that I have SEEN these people on and around the National Mall. Not veterans in particular, but people of all ages down on their luck and unable to "make the system work for them" anymore.

Seeing this episode of The West Wing reminded me to do something I've done each year at this time for several years now. It reminded me to make a food donation to the local food bank and homeless shelter.

When I walked into the local church that houses one of the 'soup kitchens' in town, I found that an old friend from high school had become director of the operation. I knew that he was affiliated with it, but he had moved up to the point where it was all his ball game now.

As I put the small bag of non-perishable groceries and large frozen turkey on the counter, he smiled and said "Well, THAT will make someone happy for a while."

"I hope so", I countered, "even if only for a while".

"You know", he said, "since homelessness isn't in the public eye as much now, donations have dropped quite a bit."

I hadn't realized that, but then again, that's the insidious thing about a lack of information... you almost never know that it's missing in the first place.

As he went over the went through the grocery bag to divide up the goods, he looked at me and said, "You must have had a good year, huh?"

"No." I said, "It was actually a little below average. But average isn't what it used to be, is it?"

He agreed, and told me that the number of people that the 'soup kitchen' served on a regular basis had actually gone up in the past few years.

While I had known that there were still homeless people around, I hadn't realized that there were MORE of them. Had you?

So, if you don't know what to do with that extra turkey, or canned ham, or even that bag of potatoes, please drop it off at a local soup kitchen or food-share operation. Not because you are doing so well, but because others aren't. Or do what I did, and go to the grocery store and buy a few things that YOU might like to have if you hadn't the means to supply yourself and your family with a holiday meal. It only took me about twenty minutes at the local supermarket and it didn't hurt my wallet at all.

Have a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season!

Let's get on with the stuff from the UseNet...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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On the subject of using Wensuite for internet access, Jos Vlietstra posts:

"I've tried everything, mailed many persons but.....the wonderful Wensuite won't connect me online!! What's the secret?? Sting works, IConnect works, Stik worked, even an old demo of Wensuite (don't know 2.60 version) worked.. But this PPP link WON'T!! Damn it, I can't stand this. So guys, if you know the trick if there's anybody out there with a NORMAL Atari (no Milan, Hades, Mac/ PC (with Magic) with an analog modem (telephone connection), a guy who has also knowledge of Sting scripts, please react! Or is it simply impossible??? I'm very curious!"

Marco Ravasini tells Jos:

"The problem with Wensuite seems to lie in the Script compilation (taking for granted you have got the registration key). Oxo say that, if setting up the Script button in the PPP link Dial Up Options on 'auto', you should connect in most cases but this is only true if you receive 'Login' and 'Password' as actual requests from your provider... If not (e.g. 'User name' and 'Password', that is similar BUT NOT THE SAME), the 'auto' configuration can't work properly. So, try to know exactly what the remote modem asks for (by running a terminal program like Connect); then write it in the PPP script with the correct spelling (case sensitiveness...) and the correct answers. Set up the Script button above on 'manual' and this should work at last (the whole procedure is explained much more minutely in one of the Wensuite help *.htm files). Good luck."

Paul Nurminen asks about converting PageStream fonts to other formats:

"I was wondering if there was any way to convert a PageStream font into a GDOS/NVDI or TTF?

I have _so many more_ PageStream fonts than I do GDOS/NVDI fonts, and a lot of them are quite nice. There are a few in particular that I'd like to make use of in Positive Image 2 with some graphics for my web site.

So far the only way I've been able to make use of them is to create a PageStream document containing the font/text I need, then "print" the PageStream document using the STraight FAX printer driver with PageStream; which "prints" the document as a FAX file that is then imported into STraight FAX, and resaved as an IMG or TIF file for use as a normal graphic in Positive Image 2.

Of course any scaling or resizing brings out the "jaggies" since the font is now essentially a bitmapped graphic.

Any ideas, or am I comparing "apples to oranges"?"

Karl Ashton tells Paul:

"I strongly suspect that there will be some sort of conversion program lurking on a ftp site, but off hand I can't think of any names.

Another alternative would be try one of the many font archives around -- such as, <<http://www.flash.net/~fontahol>>

and see if you can match the fonts you want from there..."

Matthew Carey adds:

"There was a program called PCG Font Designer that let you convert Pagestream Fonts to Postscript Type 1. You might need something on another platform such as Fontographer or a PC with NT installed to get them to TrueType from there."

Niall Moran asks for advice on buying a "new" Atari:

"I'm thinking about upgrading to a falcon or TT as i realise that my mega 4 is getting a bit long in the tooth.

Which is the bet? I have always fancied a TT but the falcon sound hardware.....

Is the TT substantially faster than the falcon?"

Martin-Eric Racine tells Niall:

"That question has been asked several times. Here's my view:

TT:

- * 32 MHz CPU and 16 MHz bus
- * includes 68882 FPU as standard
- * 4 serial ports (including one RS422 compatible with Mac)
- * VME bus (for Ethernet or graphic cards)
- * ACSI and 25-pin SCSI ports

Strengths:

Networking, UNIX environment (using MiNT or Linux), DTP (using the 19" monochrome TTM194 or TTM195), CAD, MIDI scoring (19"), software development.

Weaknesses:

8-bit sound (like STE), limited screen res / palette ratio. somewhat incompatible with some old ST software.

Falcon:

- * 16 MHz CPU and bus
- * no FPU (socket is empty - FPU must be added by user)
- * only 2 serial ports
- * DSP 56001 (audio/video calculations)
- * programable video chip
- * 50-pin SCSI2 port

Strengths:

Multimedia applications (audio recording/editing, raytracing), game development, almost completely backwards-compatible with STE software/hardware.

Weaknesses:

Buggy SCSI port, serial port stability affected by overall bus load or selected resolution, various motherboard and TOS versions all have their own quirks that make it hazardous to decide whether to install certain accelerator boards or whether certain hardware-dependant software will run correctly.

Overall appreciation:

If you make music that includes sampling, are a graphics designer or demo coder, or absolutely need compatibility with most games you have accumulated from your STE, buy the Falcon.

If networking, Linux, Ethernet, maximum expansion possibilities and sheer speed attract you, go for the TT."

Brian Van Tilborg adds:

"I fully agree with Martins Comments. Well done.

Now I might add a less technical perspective as I have recently acquired both.

TT 030 6MEG RAM 4TT/2ST 500hd.
Falcon 14Meg ram 80hd/270 syquest.

Both machines are limited but if you can get the missing pieces either one are going to suit your needs based on the QFUNKS post. Take his comments as a very good way to assess your purchase. If you play games on the Mega, I suggest that you keep it if you get a TT.

IMHO if you have a TT with Graphics Card you have and AWESOME computer. My TT just Flies on the WEB, without a card and it is just lacking in Resolution and colour. If you want to know what a TT is Like with CAB w/o a Card, just put your Mega to LOW RES and load CAB, with a Web page. The result will be no different on a TT except higher acceptable resolution. There are no tricks I have seen for TT software that do what Photochrome does on the ST to bring pictures to life. My TT I purchased after the Falcon. I have only just connected it to the internet in the past week. I cannot figure out why my FALCON is so slow compared to it, even lowering the Falcon Screen resolution doesn't change the speed. If I had a card for the TT I wouldn't probably use my Falcon. Big Statement eh.

Unfortunately Apex Media is Falcon Only. This program alone is reason to own a Falcon.

I like all my Atari computers. I like my Falcon too. My Falcon is in STock Form with 14meg of Ram. I think that if you get a Card, or An Accelerator for the Falcon, You have an AWESOME computer, that plays many ST games, and has many games written for it, ok not MANY, but a lot of games:-). It does come with more colour out of the box than the TT and 256 Colours to me is the MINIMUM you need if you want to be on the NET to appreciate its true value. The speed of MY falcon on the internet is the same as my ST if the ST has a CACHE built up and the Falcon does not, I do not know why the TT is so much faster at Tables. I do not know why my Falcon isn't uncompressing Jpgs faster than my TT. It is not even close. I have JPEG

OVERLAY and RUN JPGD.prg from the Auto folder. This is my biggest surprise. I truly wonder if my Falcons DSP works. Especially after seeing the TT just whip up some Web Pages, faster than my Falcon did with a Cache built. And it wasn't even close.

It is a tough decision. If you read Eric's post closely and know what you want to do, make your decision, if you want an 030 Atari and you are a happy Atari user, neither of these computers will disappoint you.

And the Falcon sound. There is no way to describe it.

If you really can't make your mind up get both:-).

P.S. While I have mentioned cards and accelerators for both machines, Mine are both in STock Form. I am happy to use either one. The TT for speed and the Falcon for colour. The speed of the Falcon is neither overwhelming nor disappointing, It is fully acceptable, particularly if you have been web browsing with an ST, you will like the change.

Just buy one, You can't go wrong."

My old friend Sheldon Winick adds:

"[Is the TT faster than the Falcon?]....
Definitely. The TT030 also has room for an internal 3.5" SCSI hard drive and comes with a professional keyboard, plus is designed for up to 26MB of internal RAM (using Atari's standard upgrade boards -- or even more using a 3rd party upgrade board). The math co-processor is also standard in the TT030, and it supports the 19" Atari TTM high-resolution monitor as well as several resolutions of color.

On the other hand, if you're primarily interested in playing games and color graphics, the Falcon might still be a better choice -- there are very few games that will run on the TT030."

Frank Lockwood asks for help getting CAB 2.7 to work with his STinG setup:

"After a long time using the Cab 2.7 demo with Sting and Olivier Booklage's OVL, I decided it was time to get the real thing.

Systems for Tomorrow is just tops with me.

Anyway, I know that the full install of Cab 2.7 wants to use ICONNECT, but I wish to continue using Sting.

So the install program will only allow me to designate a folder in the root of a drive, so I did that and then moved it to my D:\INTERNET\ folder. I installed the Booklage OVL and its support files in the MODULES folder, overwriting the OVL that works with ICONNECT, and I removed the SOCKETS.PRG that the installation program placed in my AUTO folder.

I am already using HSMODEM (version 7, I think), under Magic 5.11 (soon to be Magic 6 - same purchase).

When I go online, launch CAB 2.7 and try to access a URL, the first part of the download happens alright, but then I get an alert message in reversed type (white on black) across the top of my screen reading, "Kann Datei C:\ICONFSET.CFG nicht Offen. Press a key.....". When I press a key, I get a dialog box which has the message, "Connection to

SERver Failed". When I hit "Cancel" here, the page loads as normal, and the rest of the page's components download without incident. However, should I click on a link, or enter a URL again, the same error messages happen. This is getting tiresome.

Can anyone tell me how to get CAB 2.7 to stop looking for ICONNECT and to just behave with Sting?"

Derryck Croker, one of the most "STinG-aware people I know, tells Frank:

"In "Options/General" do you have the "connect automatically" box ticked? If so, clear it. This is for IConnect users, and allows CAB to automatically call the dialer and create a connection to your ISP.

If not then I'm not sure what's wrong, it should work right out of the box."

Frank replies to Derryck:

"DOH! That's exactly what it was. A little case of "Over-Configuritus" on my part."

Well folks, I'm going to call it quits here and perhaps start to think about Christmas shopping.

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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Christmas Songs Initials Puzzle

Yes, I realize that this following little Christmas trivia doesn't really belong here, but in keeping with the spirit of the holidays; and the fact this this is a challenging little test of Christmas, I thought I'd add it to this week's issue. If you get stuck and want any of the answers, just drop me an e-mail at dpj@delphi.com with the number of the song you need an answer. Let me give you a hint - just start singing every Christmas song you can think of, or start naming songs - then look for it in the list. And remember, each of the following are the first words to each song. You may know a song, but without knowing the first line, you'll drive yourself crazy!

How many of these Christmas songs can you identify using just the initials of their starting phrases?

1. HYAMLC
2. TFNTADS
3. GRYMGLNYD
4. ICUAMC
5. SNHNAICAIB
6. OTFDOCMTLGTM
7. DTHWBOHFLLLLLLLLL

8. YBWOYBNC
9. JTTWTLHC
10. YKDADAPAVCACADAB
11. ISMKSCUTMLN
12. CSBSDIHS
13. HTHASGTTNK
14. GGROBAR
15. OHNTSABS
16. AIWFCIMTFT
17. DTTISIAOHOS
18. WTKOOA
19. IDOAWCJLTOIUTK
20. CROAOFJFNAYN
21. IBTLALLC
22. OLTBHSWSTL
23. SBRAYLITLSIG
24. IBHFC
25. WWYAMCWYAMC
26. IHTBOCD
27. FTSWAJHS
28. JOSNLYETW
29. GKWLDOTFOS
30. UOTHRPOJGOSC
31. JBJBJBR
32. IHABCWY
33. WUNWTAGC (LSN)
34. JHTSBRTTT
35. CTTMPRPPP

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Gran Turismo 2'! bleem Fights Back!  
    " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "  
                                'Railroad Tycoon II'! 'Test Drive 6'!  
                                'Rage's Incoming'! 'Fighting Force 2'!  
                                And much more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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## Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Announces Railroad Tycoon II for PlayStation

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. is pleased to announce Railroad Tycoon II for PlayStation.

Set for release January 2000, PlayStation owners will finally get the opportunity to test their entrepreneurial skills and experience the

phenomenal railroad building franchise that over 2 million PC owners have become addicted to. Railroad Tycoon II is being co-developed by Gearhead Entertainment in conjunction with Tremor Entertainment under license from Gathering Of Developers and PopTop Software.

''We are extremely pleased to bring Railroad Tycoon II to the PlayStation," stated Ryan Brant, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two Interactive.

''Railroad Tycoon II was extremely successful on the PC and is sure to win a whole new set of fans on the PlayStation. With it's unique concept and depth of gameplay, fans of true empire-builders will find Railroad Tycoon II a welcome addition to their library." Adding to a global franchise over 2 million units strong, Railroad Tycoon II brings a new kind of strategy home to the PlayStation. With an extensive 18-campaign scenario, train enthusiasts work to re-create the evolution of the world's railroad systems from 1804 through 2020 and beyond with over 60 available engines and 34 cargo train types. Enter the age of the Iron Horse: select your mogul from one of 40 chairmen, create an empire and run your rivals out of town on a rail. Through dabbling in a true-to-life financial model (complete with margin buying, short-selling and hostile takeovers), you claw your way to the top. Do you build the Transcontinental Railway or the Orient Express? Do you run steam engines through the jungles of Africa or electric trains across the treacherous Swiss Alps? You decide!

#### Gran Turismo 2 to Drive PlayStation Holiday Sales

The most anticipated videogame title this holiday season, Gran Turismo 2, the sequel to the best-selling racing videogame of all time, was released nationwide on December 16, Sony Computer Entertainment America announced.

Delivering the ultimate interactive racing experience for fans of all ages, Gran Turismo 2 is available exclusively for the PlayStationfi game console.

Building upon the winning formula that made Gran Turismo the best-selling racing videogame of all time, Gran Turismo 2 is developed by the same team at Polyphony Digital Inc. (a satellite company of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.). Gran Turismo 2 presents gamers with an incredible selection of more than 500 cars from world-class manufacturers, including American muscle cars and European super cars.

Offering unprecedented auto racing realism, extraordinary graphics and gameplay, virtual drivers can choose from 20 different racing courses -- and 40 different track combinations -- to push their vehicles and driving skills to the edge.

Gamers face varied track styles including street courses, world-renowned racetracks and an all-new two-player Rally Racing Mode that allows racers to test their vehicles on dirt tracks. Gran Turismo 2 tracks include the Roma Circuit, Tahiti Road, Laguna Seca Raceway, Seattle Circuit and Pike's Peak International Hill Climb Race.

Fans of the original Gran Turismo won't be disappointed, though, as favorites like Grand Valley Speedway and Trial Mountain Circuit are back to test racers' skills.

''Gran Turismo 2 is the sequel everyone has been waiting for this holiday season, and we know gamers of all ages will be happy to see it in stores for the biggest shopping weekend of the year," said Jack Tretton, vice president, sales, Sony Computer Entertainment America.

''The original Gran Turismo has sold more than two million units in the U.S. and completely redefined the PlayStation experience. We are expecting Gran Turismo 2 to fly off the shelves faster than the original, continuing the momentum of this incredible franchise."

In Gran Turismo 2 racers fine-tune their cars in real-life garages as they shave precious seconds off their times. Authentic automotive and racing brands are woven into gameplay to add to Gran Turismo 2's realism. As they increase their racing skills, gamers can go for 52 different license tests, 36 more than in the original game.

Incorporating handling, maneuverability and throttle response that mirror true car physics, the incredibly genuine driving experience of Gran Turismo 2 is further fueled by seamless 3D graphics. Highly detailed, updated car models show off the television-quality visuals and revolutionary environment mapping that maximize the PlayStation game console's graphic capabilities.

Authenticity is enhanced by recorded audio of actual cars and compatibility with the DUALSHOCK analog controller, allowing gamers to feel every curve and crevice on each course. Dozens of modifications and customizations can be made to any car, tuning them to conditions and tracks.

An extensive marketing campaign accompanies Gran Turismo 2's launch, including a multi-million dollar television and print advertising campaign, as well as a promotional partnership with Pizza Hutfi that will see the distribution of five million PlayStation demo discs through Dec. 19, inclusive of a Gran Turismo 2 demo.

Gran Turismo 2 will also be supported by dedicated point-of-purchase displays including in-store PlayStation interactive demo kiosks, in-store merchandising videos and a merchandiser display program.

Put on Your Driving Gloves and Fold the Top Down...  
Roadsters for Nintendo 64 is Ready to Roll

Titus Software announced Tuesday the release of their racing game for the Nintendo 64 platform, Roadsters. Bringing hands-on racing excitement to the console like never before, the game features themed races with two-seater convertible sports coupes.

''We are happy to announce the shipment of Roadsters for the Nintendo 64," said Frederic Oualid, Vice President of Marketing at Titus Software. ''With the combination of fast racing action and the thrill of roof-down driving, this game offers the most exhilarating auto simulation to date."

For some of the 30 different cars featured in Roadsters, Titus has licensed the world's finest sports cars. Licenses include such race-worthy names as Fiat, Lotus, TVR, Ginetta, Renault, Wiesman, Ford, Mitsubishi, Toyota, Jaguar, and others. Players can configure, modify, and upgrade each car to suit their abilities and manage their car control preferences.

With Roadsters, players can choose from one of eight drivers - in addition, each car and track combination presents new challenges. With ten themed tracks to unlock, each with incredible graphics and unique effects, gamers must hone their driving abilities to open all possible routes.

Up to four racers can join in the fun and race against each other head-to-head in an extreme, white-knuckle racing contest. In the one-player mode, gamers race to beat the clock and their computer opponents in order to gain cash. Collecting this prize money has great rewards, as players can purchase auto upgrades and unlock levels.

Roadsters for the Nintendo 64 is available nationwide starting today, and represents the first in Titus' multi-platform launch of the Roadsters property. Hitting stores just in time for the holidays, it is competitively priced at \$49.

#### Infogrames North America Makes Dreams Come True With Test Drive 6 for the Sega Dreamcast-Arriving in Stores This Week

Infogrames North America, Inc. announced Thursday that Test Drive 6 will begin shipping this week for the Sega Dreamcast video game console. Test Drive 6, the latest installment in the highly successful Test Drive series, is also available for the Sony PlayStation game console, personal computer and the Nintendo Game Boy Color.

"The Sega Dreamcast has taken gamers by storm with its graphical prowess and sheer gameplay power," said Laddie Ervin, director of marketing for sports and racing at Infogrames North America. "Test Drive 6 takes full advantage of the console's technology to deliver unparalleled racing action and stunning graphics."

Test Drive 6 has a completely revamped physics model, which gives each car in its class a specific driving style and handling model. Players can upgrade each car's engine, brakes, tires and suspension as they progress through the game to improve performance. New to Test Drive 6 are interactive driving environments that include moveable objects, obstacles and shortcuts. Players can race through outdoor cafes in Paris, crashing into tables and causing them to fly into the air, they can swerve to avoid barriers on the streets of Rome, or knock over rickshaws in the back alleys of Hong Kong. Some of the more than 34 tracks in Test Drive 6 include Jordan, Maui, Tahoe, Italy, Switzerland and New York.

The game's new artificial intelligence (AI) allows each computer driver to react uniquely to different situations, so racing opponents can be bumped and jostled off their paths. In addition, if opponents take turns too quickly, it will cause them to occasionally wipe out. Cross traffic in Test Drive 6 will swerve to avoid racers and cops will chase all of the speeding cars, not just the player's car.

Test Drive 6 for the Sega Dreamcast includes 40 licensed vehicles, including Dodge '69 Charger, '99 Dodge Viper GTS, Dodge Viper GTS-R, Dodge Concept, Plymouth '72 Hemi Cuda, '99 Prowler, Saleen S351, F150 Lightning, '97 Mustang Super Stallion, '68 GT-40, 1968.5 Mustang 428 CJ, '90 Mustang LX 5.0, Lotus '80 Esprit Turbo, '99 Elise, Esprit V8, GT1, Jaguar '94 XJ220, '99 XKR, XK180, TVR '99 Cerbera, Speed 12, Griffith, Aston Martin '99 DB7 Vantage Coupe, Project Vantage, Shelby '66 Cobra, '99 Series 1, Venturi '99 Atlantique and 400 GT, Panoz '99 Esperante, Nissan '99 Skyline and R390 GT1, Caterham 7, Audi '99 TT, Marcos '99 Mantaray, Toyota '99 GT-One and the '99 Subaru Impreza.

The game's hot licensed soundtrack kicks into gear in the introduction

video with Fear Factory and their remake of Gary Numan's Cars, featuring Gary Numan. The soundtrack also features Eve 6, Empirion, Gearwhore, Q-Burns, Lunatic Calm, Cirrus and the Kottonmouth Kings.

Test Drive 6 features two-player split screen racing and supports the Jump Pack. The estimated retail price for Test Drive 6 for the Sega Dreamcast is \$49.99.

For more information please visit the Test Drive 6 web site at <http://www.td6.com>.

### 3DO Leads New Videogaming Category With Softball Slam

#### Industry First is a Game for All Ages

The 3DO Company announced it is launching a new sports genre in videogaming with the debut of the Softball Slam game. The Softball Slam game is the first simulation of the popular American game for next generation gaming systems and features all the high-scoring excitement and action that has made it a favorite pastime of kids and adults around the world. The Softball Slam game will be available for the PlayStation game console and for the PC in late February 2000.

The Softball Slam game is designed to appeal to all ages and skill levels with an easy-to-master, one-button interface and fast-paced game action that will allow a full game to be played in under half an hour. Unlike more "serious" sports simulations, the Softball Slam game is filled with non-stop arcade action, and over-the-top visual and audio effects, including flaming softballs and player taunting. Additionally, the game will feature 24 unique teams (male, female and co-ed), each personified by a star player. A detailed player and team editor will allow gamers to create their own character likeness, as well as their friends, for a completely original softball team.

"Softball is one of the most popular sports in the US with over 50 million adults and children participating," said Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of The 3DO Company. "We believe the Softball Slam game successfully captures the action of the sport, but maintains accurate softball physics and rules so kids and adults can practice their skills and become better players on the field."

The Softball Slam game is created by the team responsible for the critically acclaimed "High Heat Baseball 2000," considered the most realistic and enjoyable simulation of America's pastime by top computer gaming publications such as Computer Gaming World, PC Gamer and PC Accelerator. Marketing for the Softball Slam game includes a print advertising campaign in gaming and consumer publications, extensive online promotions, and in-store demos.

### Konami Runs for the Gold With Its Newest PlayStation and Game Boy Title: International Track & Field 2000

Konami of America brings the high-speed excitement, photo finishes, incredible feats and the adrenaline rush of Track & Field to PlayStation

and Game Boy with the release of International Track & Field 2000. The only track & field title available for both console platforms, International Track & Field 2000 utilizes the same lightning fast gameplay that was made famous by Konami in the original arcade classic. International Track & Field 2000 combines more than 12 different track & field events and boasts vibrant graphics that truly capture the pageantry of International competition. Endorsed by Maurice Greene, three-time gold medalist at the 1999 World Championships and the world's fastest man, International Track & Field 2000 is now available in stores for a suggested retail price of \$39.99.

Players can simulate real international track and field competition like never before as life-like motion capture animation helps showcase the thrill of victory and agony of defeat as gamers go for the gold. Participants can compete with up to three challengers in such traditional events as the 100-meter dash, long jump, and discus. The ambitious can test their skills in other diverse events such as weightlifting and cycling.

Greene, the world record holder in the 100-meter dash, will act as the spokesman for International Track & Field 2000 and appear on packaging, in print advertising and in all on-line marketing. Greene is represented by HSI (Handling Speed Intelligently), the leading global track & field group, which has entered into a partnership with Konami to produce the most authentic track & field game ever in time for the Sydney Olympics 2000. The game, which is being developed for the upcoming PlayStation 2 platform, will mark the first time professionals, including Greene and 1996 Olympic Bronze Medalist and 1997 World Champion Ato Boldon, have been utilized in a motion capture session. Beyond the motion capture session, the HSI athletes and management team will be intricately involved with the development process to make sure that every element of the graphics and gameplay are as realistic as possible. An avid gamer, Greene has been a big supporter of the Konami Track & Field series.

"Maurice Greene's personality is a perfect fit for our product," said Craig Howe, Konami Brand Marketing Manager. "He's energetic, he's intense and being the fastest man on earth makes him the perfect match for the button-pounding intensity that has made the Track & Field franchise famous."

#### Eidos Interactive Announces Fighting Force 2 Is Now Shipping

Eidos Interactive announced Monday that Fighting Force 2 is now shipping for the PlayStation game console, with the Sega Dreamcast version to ship next week.

Fighting Force 2 is a sequel to the fierce action brawler Fighting Force developed by the creators of the Tomb Raider series, Core Design. Featuring highly interactive 3D environments and advanced combat, the brand goes forward with all-new gameplay and groundbreaking technology. Fighting Force 2 follows on the success of the original, which earned "Greatest Hits" status in 1998.

The sequel takes gameplay to a new level, combining elements of fast-paced action, a variety of hand-to-hand combat moves, and an arsenal of over 20 lethal weapons. Gamers take on the role of Hawk Manson who must go undercover in a highly classified covert mission of government espionage

where the goal is simple: investigate and exterminate. The gameplay takes place in a variety of locations ranging from the steel mills of Pittsburgh to the South Pole. The expansive environments designed for interactive negotiation and strategic exploration coupled with the intense gameplay, amazing visuals and special effects create an action game like no other.

#### Interplay Releases Rage's Incoming For Sega Dreamcast!

Interplay Entertainment Corp. announced Monday the release of Rage's Incoming. Now available at retail outlets, Incoming is the ultimate futuristic fight against alien intervention.

Incoming gives gamers the chance to engage in battle with the finest in air, land and sea combat craft. It's an addictive multi-vehicle shoot-em-up with frantic, varied action. Incoming delivers intense atmosphere via dramatic, breathtaking special effects coupled with all out action, resulting in weekend-losing player immersion!

Incoming also features a command arsenal of over 35 vehicles including helicopters, stealth boats, sand skimmers and space shuttles. Adding to the excitement is an awesome line up of military hardware featuring laser turrets, track tanks, sand crawlers, and alien fighters. Six graphically speculator game worlds provide an absorbing gameplay experience. The games 65 diverse missions allow for an enthralling gameplay experience.

Incoming is the first Sega Dreamcast title among a strong line-up scheduled for the new platform from Interplay. Interplay, known for its strong PC line-up, plans to increase its focus on the console market for the year 2000 and beyond.

#### Psygnosis Enters the Winner's Circle With Formula One 99

Psygnosis Wednesday announced the release of Formula One 99, the latest addition to the hugely successful Formula One racing series.

An official product of the FIA Formula One World Championship, Formula One 99 allows players to compete at the highest levels of motorsport excellence, racing against the best drivers and teams, with all the tracks and regulations of the 1999 season. Formula One 99 for the PlayStationfi game console is now available in stores everywhere, for an estimated retail price of \$39.99. A PC CD-ROM version of Formula One 99 will follow in February.

Psygnosis' Formula One series has always been top of the league and Formula One 99 is no exception. As the reviews begin to come in, gaming editors everywhere agree that F1 99 provides the ultimate Formula One racing experience. With its perfect combination of ultra-realistic gameplay, intricate detail, and graphical excellence, Formula One 99 is the next best thing to competing in real-life!

'Gamers' Republic" described Formula One 99 as "the best-looking console rendition of the sport ever seen." A "GameFan" writer declared, "It's not often that I'll toss aside my Dreamcast pad in exchange for a DUALSHOCK(TM) analog controller. But Formula One 99 is just that amazing."



And ``PSM" -- the number one PlayStation magazine in North America -- awarded Formula One 99 4.5 out of 5 stars, describing the game as ``the definitive F1 racing experience. . .a triumphant racing simulation."

Formula One 99 was developed from the ground-up by a completely new team -- Studio 33, a developer with a strong heritage in racing games. One of the most stunning new features of Formula One 99 is the game's amazing draw-distance, which allows players to see literally miles of track ahead of them with no pop-up. The game also includes working rear-view mirrors and a reverse view, which allows you to look back while you're actually driving.

To ensure Formula One 99 was as authentic as possible, the development team was able to obtain CAD (computer-aided design) files for the first time, directly from the Formula One Association, allowing the tracks to be recreated as realistically as possible. And, to further add to the realism of the Formula One experience, the game includes a full-hour qualifying simulation, which allows players to watch the race from the pit lane and react to factors such as drivers' times, changing weather conditions, etc.

Fully editable grids allow you to place drivers in any order and to replicate the season's actual races. And, for the first time ever, Formula One 99 includes Jacques Villeneuve as part of the full 1999 driver line-up, along with other high-profile drivers such as former World Champions Michael Schumacher and Damon Hill.

Infogrames North America, Inc. Turns the  
PlayStation Blue With the Smurfs

Infogrames North America announced the shipping of The Smurfs for PlayStation. Children ages 5 and up will experience smurfy fun this holiday season with Hefty Smurf, Gargamel, Papa Smurf, Smurfette and virtual Baby Smurf, who requires extra special care to keep him happy.

One of the first PlayStation games dedicated to a younger generation; The Smurfs is designed to entertain young children for hours using the fun-filled atmosphere of Smurf Village. Gameplay is divided into two parts - an initiation stage for the PlayStation beginner and a more complex stage for advanced players.

The beginner stage introduces virtual Baby Smurf to the Smurf family giving youngsters the responsibility of nurturing and caring for him as they would a little brother or sister. And, as all new babies do, Baby Smurf needs food and entertaining so players must keep him happy by searching through seven environments for bottles and rattles placed throughout the forest.

``The Smurfs is a perfect video game for the little brother or little sister looking to emulate their older siblings on the PlayStation," said Rick Reynolds, director of product marketing for Infogrames North America's Family Label. ``The easy to learn controls, dynamic and vibrant environments as well as parent friendly gameplay make The Smurfs a hit this holiday season."

As the player becomes more experienced, he or she can try more of a challenge in the second section of the game. This section requires the mighty skills of Hefty Smurf to save his fellow Smurfs from Gargamel's Gorgs through ten levels of adventures.

Developed by Heliovisions, The Smurfs is a single-player game with the capability to save at different levels of play with a memory card. The Smurfs is available in most major retail outlets for an estimated retail price of \$39.99.

### Bleem Fights Back: Sony Faces Antitrust Counterclaims in PlayStation Lawsuit

The ongoing court battle waged by Sony Computer Entertainment of America, Inc. against the makers of ``bleem!", a software program which allows games designed for the Sony PlayStation to be played on personal computers, entered a new phase last Friday, following a series of rulings in favor of the tiny startup company. In the day's most notable decision, the Honorable Judge Charles A. Legge of the United States District Court for the Northern District of California granted Bleem's motion for leave to amend and assert counterclaims against the electronics giant.

Los Angeles-based Bleem claims Sony has unlawfully acquired, maintained, and extended its monopoly in the video game market through a combination of anti-competitive practices, including misuse of copyright, patents and other intellectual property. Bleem further asserts that the current lawsuit exemplifies these practices and is a ``sham," brought in bad faith.

Further claims against Sony include combination or conspiracy in restraint of trade, intentional interference with contractual relations, defamation, and unfair competition with regard to Sony's well-publicized efforts to force show management to remove Bleem's booth from the E3 trade event last May.

In other matters before the Court, Sony's internal Legal and Business Affairs officers attempted to modify an existing protective order and gain access to Bleem's most confidential business data. The information in question includes detailed reseller information, source code for the bleem! software, identities of bleem! customers, and information relating to negotiations with third-party software and hardware companies.

Commenting from the bench that such protective orders serve to ``protect David from Goliath," Judge Legge denied Sony's request to re-classify Bleem's confidential business information with respect to all but one narrow category of financial information. All other protected information will remain accessible only to outside legal counsel.

This decision came at the end of a week in which Sony stepped up its efforts against Bleem. On December 7, just four days after a discovery conference with Bleem's counsel and three days prior to Friday's hearing, Sony served subpoenas on 10 of Bleem's biggest customers, demanding detailed information regarding purchasing, sales, promotion and profits resulting from the bleem! product. Sony issued these subpoenas without adequate prior notice to Bleem, resulting in angry phone calls from unsuspecting retailers.

``What we have here is a pretty transparent attempt by Sony to intimidate the retailers into pulling bleem! from their shelves," said Jon Hangartner, lead attorney for Bleem. ``Even if Sony's subpoenas weren't invalid on their face, the information they request is irrelevant to the lawsuit. These subpoenas have nothing to do with potential damages; they

only serve to scare bleem!'s vendors into thinking they might be Sony's next target."

At the end of Friday's session, Judge Legge agreed to hear an expedited motion to quash the subpoenas. He also authorized Bleem to tell its retailers they need not do anything until he renders his decision. Bleem is expected to submit the necessary motion to the court early this week in order to protect the confidential information of their customers.

"I've been instructed to take every possible action in defense of Bleem's retail partners," said Hangartner. "Most of these stores keep their sales figures and arrangements in the strictest confidence, and Sony simply has no business demanding this kind of proprietary data from innocent third-parties, particularly when it has no bearing on the case whatsoever."

Since first filing suit against Bleem on April 2, 1999, Sony has brought three motions before the court in attempts to halt sales of the bleem! software, including two Temporary Restraining Orders and a Preliminary Injunction. All have failed. The original lawsuit, filed before bleem! was even released to the public, alleges a host of claims including copyright infringement and misappropriation of trade secrets in the development and sale of bleem! Bleem, LLC has consistently denied Sony's allegations in every respect.

With a suggested retail price of \$29.95, bleem! is a software program that lets gamers everywhere play hundreds of PlayStation games on Windows 95/98-based PCs, with higher resolutions than the original PlayStation and effects that rival next-generation game consoles. Initially released on the Internet, bleem! soon developed a strong following, selling over 20,000 copies in just a few months. A retail launch followed and in less than five months, another 150,000 copies have been sold worldwide. The bleem! website, [www.bleem.com](http://www.bleem.com), receives over 70,000 visitors a day and offers free updates, compatibility info, and an active message-board community.

For more information, visit <http://www.bleem.com>, or contact Lauren Tascan at 212-772-3900, or David Herpolsheimer, Bleem, LLC at 323-822-0932.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -      Online Users Growl & Purr!
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# Atari Founder Nolan Bushnell Joins WebQuest International, Inc.'s Board Of Directors

WebQuest International, Inc., creators of the iPONG Game Arcade ([www.ipong.com](http://www.ipong.com)), announced today that Nolan Bushnell is joining the company's Board Of Directors, subject to stockholder approval.

Nolan Bushnell is best known as the founder of Pong, Atari Corporation and Chuck E. Cheese Pizza Time Theatre and is considered by some to be the "Father of the Video Game Industry". Bushnell started Atari with an

initial investment of \$500 and sold the company to Warner Company for \$28 million four years later.

Bushnell received his B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Utah where he is a "Distinguished Fellow" and also attended Stanford University Graduate School. Bushnell frequently lectures on entrepreneurship and innovation at major universities and corporations throughout the United States.

"We are thrilled to have Nolan join the company. The game he created has evolved from a 2-dimensional home game to a three-dimensional, universal, online tournament game. Pong is not being played by two people who are in the same room anymore. It's being played by two people who could be anywhere in the world. We believe his participation will lend a great deal of influence and credibility to the concept of fee-based online games. He possesses an understanding of the needs of gamers and will be an important factor in our growth." said Kirk Johnson, CEO of WebQuest.

"It's flattering to see the renewed interest in Pong after so many years, especially amid all the complex strategy games on the market right now. I'm excited about having an opportunity to participate in its rebirth as an online multiplayer tournament game. I'm also happy to see that the cost of playing a game is still only twenty-five cents." said Nolan Bushnell.

The new version of Pong , to be released in early 2000, has an appealing twist. Players can join the iPONG Players Association (IPA) allowing them the opportunity to compete for large cash purses in tournaments.

WebQuest International, Inc. is an Internet development company based in Minden, Nevada. They operate five Internet sites including The iPONG Game Arcade at [www.ipong.com](http://www.ipong.com), [www.freehoroscopes.net](http://www.freehoroscopes.net) [www.nancyskitchen.com](http://www.nancyskitchen.com), [www.bannerclicks.com](http://www.bannerclicks.com) and [www.scavengernet.com](http://www.scavengernet.com).

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Traditional Stores Back Web Taxes

Traditional retailers are joining forces with state and local government officials this week to try to prevent the Internet from evolving into a tax-free sales haven.

But they face an uphill battle in their effort to persuade a government board, the 19-member Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce, to adopt their position. The commission is deeply divided on the issue, and so is the political world - though not along partisan lines.

It meets here Tuesday and Wednesday to hear from retailers and begin considering 37 proposals on taxation of Internet commerce.

Disagreeing with traditional retailers, the commission's chairman, Gov. Jim Gilmore, R-Va., advocates a permanent ban on Internet taxation, including sales taxes.

Gilmore and his allies - top Republican congressional leaders, most of the GOP's 2000 presidential candidates, much of the e-commerce industry and numerous anti-tax groups - argue that taxation would only slow economic growth by shackling the Internet.

On the other side is the National Governors Association - led by Republican Gov. Mike Leavitt of Utah, a commission member - as well as cities, counties and state legislatures that fear growing Internet commerce will erode the tax base needed to provide services.

Sales taxes are the single largest source of revenue for most states and local governments, amounting to \$147 billion in 1997. And although e-commerce is only a fraction of total sales in the United States today, it is expected to go nowhere but up.

"I think the anti-tax forces have all the momentum going into this meeting," said Ron Nehring, director of national campaigns at Americans for Tax Reform. "If there is going to be a consensus position, it will be the electronic freedom position."

Joining the fray is a new group, the E-Fairness Coalition, which includes major national chains such as Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. - the nation's biggest retailer - and Radio Shack as well as smaller mom-and-pop stores.

Speaking for the coalition, Wal-Mart executive David Bullington said government has a "duty" to collect sales tax from Internet shoppers. Failing to do so is "totally incorrect tax policy," he said.

The commission is supposed to send its recommendation to Congress in April. It is also grappling with questions such as international tariffs and banning Internet access taxes as well as sale taxes.

In most states, people are technically required to pay sales taxes on catalog and Internet purchases, but there is little enforcement and few do so voluntarily. A three-year ban on new Internet taxes passed by Congress last year has no impact on this, since sales taxes are not new.

But in 1992, the Supreme Court ruled that a state could not force a remote seller to collect and remit sales taxes unless it had a physical presence within that state. The justices said Congress would have to enact any change.

Leavitt and most of his fellow governors advocate a voluntary e-commerce sales tax system in which states would each eventually adopt a single rate - dozens of cities and counties now have their own rates - and a "trusted third party" would use computer software to collect and distribute the money based on location of the purchaser.

Aside from the revenue questions, many Republican governors say keeping sales taxes out of the Internet represents an unfair advantage.

"Government should not be in the business of picking favorites among competitive forces such as traditional retailers or emerging electronic retailers," said Gov. John Engler, R-Mich.

The Clinton administration opposes an outright ban on Internet sales

taxes but says it is too soon to begin imposing a new tax system. The focus should first be on simplifying the multiple state systems, said a senior administration official speaking on condition of anonymity.

Finding compromise may be elusive, however. The e-commerce tax panel is likely to produce only a series of options, since a consensus position requires a two-thirds affirmative vote. And the Republican-led Congress has shown no appetite for helping states tax Internet sales.

''There are too many special interests and political interests to develop a large consensus right now," said David Lifson, tax chairman of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. ''Maybe the problem needs to get even worse. Then there will be the political support to do something."

Deal May Bar Internet Access Tax

Amid sharp discord over sales taxes on e-commerce, a federal commission Wednesday neared agreement on prohibiting Internet access levies and scrapping a telephone tax originally created to finance the Spanish-American War.

The 19-member Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce, created by Congress to devise future Internet tax rules, planned later Wednesday to consider those two recommendations as it continued to thrash out the sales tax issue.

''I think those are places where a consensus, in fact, is developing," said Gov. Jim Gilmore, R-Va., the panel's chairman. ''On the question of the sales tax, there is much debate left to be done."

The commission was considering two key recommendations to Congress:

- Permanently barring federal, state or local taxes on the monthly charges people pay for Internet access. Such taxes in a handful of states were exempted from a three-year federal Internet tax moratorium if they were in place before Oct. 1, 1998.

- Abolishing the 3 percent federal excise tax on telephone service, first imposed in 1898 as part of the Spanish War Act. Initially a luxury tax when there were few phones, it now raises about \$5 billion annually for the federal government.

Although commission members agreed both moves had the necessary two-thirds support to win approval, several cautioned that they could be used as bargaining chips in negotiations over the sales tax and other controversial issues.

''These are a series of small steps in the middle we can take," said Grover Norquist, a commission member and president of Americans for Tax Reform.

The commission plans a final meeting in March, with its report to Congress due in April. The unresolved central question is whether the 46 states that impose sales taxes should be allowed to extend them to Internet purchases.

The National Governors Association, joined by organizations representing state legislators, counties and cities, urged the commission to reject proposals that would prevent sales taxes on e-commerce.

Such an exemption, they said, could endanger vital government services, force states to raise other taxes, and would give Internet businesses an unfair competitive edge over traditional brick-and-mortar sellers.

"What we are doing right now is creating a loophole, an unfair loophole," said Gov. William Janklow, R-S.D. "Success in America should not be based on a loophole."

The state and local governments want to set up a voluntary e-commerce sales tax system in which states would gradually adopt a single statewide rate. A "trusted third party" would use software to collect and distribute the money based on the location of the purchaser.

Opponents said the plan raises serious privacy questions because of the "third party" collector and that it is unfair for states to tax people who live somewhere else. There is also no evidence that e-commerce is eroding state budgets, most of which are now awash in surplus cash, say opponents of the plan.

"I just don't buy it," said Dean Andal, a commission member and vice chairman of the California Board of Equalization. "There is no evidence of significant revenue loss."

Siding with the states, 49 tax experts from universities across the country also asked the commission not to permanently exempt Internet commerce from sales taxes.

"Once electronic commerce has become an established retail channel, it should not be treated differently than other commerce," said George Zodrow, a Rice University economist.

Libraries Pressured on Web Filters

Libraries that defend unrestricted Internet access as free speech are facing growing resistance from parents and family groups that want to block out porn sites.

The pressures prompted one library this week to drop Internet access altogether, a move the American Library Association called unprecedented. City commissioners in Hudsonville, Mich., voted Monday to pull the plug.

Hudsonville officials said they felt cornered: If its library installed software filters to block out sexually explicit sites, free-speech advocates might sue. If the library did not, then conservative groups might sue. The American Family Association was already demanding a referendum on restricting access.

"It's really sad we have to do this," said Pauline Luben, assistant city manager for Hudsonville, a Grand Rapids suburb of about 7,000. "We didn't feel we can financially fight it."

Free-speech battles are not new to libraries. They are often confronted with campaigns to ban such books as Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn"

because of what they consider racism or other objectionable topics.

What makes the Internet different is its reach and its ease of access. Libraries can decide which books to buy. But with the Internet, a youngster can browse the world - and see all sorts of sexually explicit material.

Judith Krug, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, called Hudsonville's action appalling and said she fears more such battles will result in other communities.

'It's the biggest issue in libraries," she said.

According to an October report by a pro-filtering group, Filtering Facts, more than 75 libraries installed filters on all of their terminals over the past year, bringing the total to nearly 1,000. Anchorage, Alaska, and Memphis, Tenn., were among the communities to do so this year.

Other libraries, such as Boston's, filter terminals in their children's sections only.

Thousands of other libraries refuse to install filters. Some cite a ruling last year from a federal judge who said the libraries in Loudoun County, Va., violated the First Amendment by filtering all its terminals.

The American Civil Liberties Union complains that installing filters on terminals used by grown-ups as well as children denies adults access to materials they are constitutionally permitted to see. The ACLU also notes that electronic filters that search for certain words are imperfect and may even block materials on birth control and AIDS.

The American Library Association opposes filters altogether, believing age is no reason to deny anyone materials protected by the First Amendment. The group believes parents should decide what is appropriate for their kids.

That attitude irks parents like Beth Spader, whose son stumbled onto an image of a woman naked from the waist down. Tyler, now 13, was looking for online pictures of wrestlers at their library in Brielle, N.J.

'It's unbelievable to think an institution such as the public library would be openly providing hard-core obscenity," Mrs. Spader said. 'My assumption was that libraries are safe."

Karen Jo Gounaud, president of Family Friendly Libraries in Springfield, Va., said free access is not a matter of free speech. The Constitution protects Playboy, she said, but libraries do not have to subscribe.

'Constitutionally protected material does not mean taxpayers-funded, guaranteed access to materials," she said. 'Material that is legal doesn't mean it must be in the library."

She also claims such sites make libraries a haven for pedophiles and sexual molesters.

According to a telephone poll earlier this year by the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, 58 percent believed libraries should block access to sites that might offend some people. Thirty-eight percent wanted no restrictions, and the rest were undecided.

In 1996, Congress tried to curb Internet smut by making it a crime to put adult-oriented material online where children can find it. A year later, the Supreme Court struck it down. Since then, Congress passed a less restrictive law, but a federal judge in Philadelphia blocked it earlier this year. Federal courts also have blocked state laws in Michigan, New Mexico and New York.

The passage of filtering laws represents the next line of attack.

Many parents, unable to persuade their libraries to install filters, are turning to City Hall, state legislatures, even Congress.

Arizona and South Dakota passed laws this year requiring public libraries to restrict Internet access to minors by using a filter or some other means.

In Congress, bills sponsored by Rep. Bob Franks, R-N.J., and Sen. John McCain (news - web sites), R-Ariz., would require libraries to install filters to receive federal Internet subsidies. Similar language is in a larger piece of legislation working its way through Congress.

Computer Package Deals Assessed

Q: I'm looking to get a computer for a holiday gift, and almost every special offer these days seems to come as a package deal with Internet service. Are these offers worthwhile?

A: In September, the Federal Trade Commission issued this consumer alert for would-be computer buyers:

"Very often, the conditions described in current offers can turn so-called 'free' or low-cost PC's into bigger-ticket items than you think."

One offer that seems to grace just about every computer ad is a \$400 "rebate" that doesn't fit the usual definition since it requires a three-year subscription for Web service from companies such as CompuServe, Dell Computer or Prodigy.

At \$21.95 a month, the CompuServe and Dell deals will cost an additional \$790.20 over the three-year period. At \$19.95 a month, Prodigy will cost \$718.20.

While these offers are optional, often the \$400 is already subtracted from the prices displayed most prominently by computer sellers in ads, stores and online.

There's usually an asterisk or another small marking near the price to indicate that there's some fine print to be read elsewhere in the ad or on the Web site.

Since most Internet users pay a monthly charge for dial-up access to the Web anyway, there's nothing fundamentally unfair about the rebate offers.

While it's possible to pay less for Internet access, a monthly fee of \$21.95 clearly wasn't the deciding factor for the 19 million people who use America Online, the parent company of CompuServe. Nor has it hurt

CompuServe, Microsoft's MSN or AT&T WorldNet, each of which have more than 2 million accounts.

Meanwhile, for those who'd prefer to stagger the cost of buying a new computer, the CompuServe and Prodigy deals offer an enticing way to avoid paying high interest rates on an installment plan.

Remember, however, that the upfront savings afforded by these deals aren't that immediate because the buyer needs to put the \$400 down first and then mail in for a rebate.

Another problem, some critics say, is that a three-year commitment is the equivalent of eons and countless product upgrades in the ever-changing world of technology and the Web.

Who knows if you'll even need an Internet service in three years? CompuServe argues that even with new high-speed connections through cable TV wires or DSL over a regular phone wire, subscribers need to pay an Internet service provider.

That's true right now, but the rules could be rewritten by new deals where Internet service is packaged with telephone service, cable or new computers.

"Technology is changing at a dizzying pace. It's possible that the three-year Internet service you lock in today could be out-of-date in six months or a year," the FTC consumer alert warned.

For those undaunted by a three-year commitment, perhaps the most intriguing computer deal comes from PeoplePC, a new venture partnered with Toshiba, Compaq Computer and MCI WorldCom.

For \$24.95 a month and no down payment other than a shipping fee of \$48, PeoplePC will supply a fairly powerful computer made by Toshiba or Compaq with unlimited Web access from MCI WorldCom. The offer even includes a monitor and speakers.

Over three years, the total cost will be \$946.20, at which point the subscriber owns the computer, but could sign up for another three years and a new machine.

The biggest drawback would seem to be the uncertainty over just how obsolete the PeoplePC machine will be after three years since it's not the highest-end model right now.

Still, even today's most cutting-edge computers will likely be dinosaurs sooner than later.

Free Vs Fee? U.S. Web Access Firms Face New Threat

U.S. Internet service providers, such as America Online Inc., who depend on charging access fees for much of their revenue, are facing a growing threat as a number of new rivals are offering free or low-cost Web access.

Now that the affluent, highly-educated audience has been reeled onto the Web hook, line and sinker, the newest targets are middle and lower-income Americans who are hesitant to buy a home PC, much less pay for Internet

access.

Some Internet service providers this week started playing a high-stakes game by joining forces with leading U.S. retailers, such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc., to offer no- or low-fee Web access, betting that the benefits of increased traffic and advertising will more than offset any cannibalization of their current services.

''The free services are definitely going to carve out and sustain a niche in the market, but they probably won't take the majority of households," said Joe Laszlo, an analyst at research firm Jupiter Communications.

''At the same time competitive pressures from these free services are almost certain to force the fees that do get paid down over time," he said.

This week may have been a milestone for the free-access movement as three major Internet service providers forged alliances with three of the biggest U.S. retailers in what analysts said is a push among ISPs to boost their subscriber base at the lowest costs possible to their companies.

On Wednesday, Kmart Corp., the No. 3 U.S. retailer, hooked up with Yahoo! Inc. to provide free Internet access through its new ISP called BlueLight.com. That same day, AOL signed a deal with Circuit City Stores Inc., the No. 2 U.S. seller of consumer electronics.

And on Thursday, America Online pushed the envelope even further when it said it was linking with Wal-Mart to form a low-cost Internet access service, capitalizing on the more than 90 million shoppers who visit Wal-Mart stores every year.

As a result, analyst said the flood gates have been opened to the more than 56 percent of American households that are not online, and the task for Internet access firms will be finding the best way to coax the masses to use their services.

Free Web access is most popular in Europe, as Internet users are subject to heavy charges for local telephone calls. AOL was Britain's largest ISP until a year ago when Freeserve Plc (FRE.L), the brainchild of electrical retailer Dixons Plc (DXNS.L), erupted onto the scene waiving monthly service fees.

Currently, 1.5 million American households access the Web for free, while 41.4 million households go through another type of service, according to Jupiter Communications. By 2003, Jupiter estimates as many as 8.8 million households will use some kind of free service to access the Web.

Laszlo said while only two players in the free access space -- NetZero Inc. and AltaVista, a unit of Internet venture firm CMGI Inc. -- have established themselves in the market, he expects that number to grow significantly.

NetZero currently has 1 million subscribers to its service while AltaVista has 500,000, according to Jupiter data.

''There's going to be potentially the resumption of the battle between free ISP service and fee-based ISP service," said Ulric Weil, analyst at Friedman Billings Ramsey & Co.

Most analysts agree the established ISPs such as AOL and Microsoft Corp. are unlikely to be under immediate threat, nor would they consider slashing their prices for mainstream services.

''AOL is very confident based on past experience that this sort of thing doesn't work, that these people cannot make any money by offering the service for free," Weil said. ''It just gets too expensive on the communication costs side." In the United States, Web access costs between \$10 and \$22 per month, making subscription fees the No. 1 source of revenues for Internet service providers, according to Jupiter.

However, more ISPs are moving away from the subscription-based model to business based on ad revenues, commerce and financial services, analysts said. Some companies are even opting to create low-cost or free ''stripped-down" PCs designed to offer basic Web access with a specific provider.

''They're definitely both workable models," said Jim Preissler, an analyst with PaineWebber.

''Think of it as Coke, RC Cola and Brand X cola," Preissler said. ''They segment to different areas, and they all have viable opportunities."

''In some respects, the value segment is seen as a decent business, whereas the free business is seen in some people's opinion as a loss-leader or a customer acquisition tool or a break-even business," Preissler said.

Still, some analysts agree that free versus fee is not the main issue in garnering a broader subscriber base. Rather, companies will have to find new and exciting ways to educate so-called ''non-wired" people to the benefits of being online in order to lure them to use their services specifically.

''In general, getting the message out in new venues and in a more targeted way is what's important here," Laszlo said. "Affiliations with the bricks-and-mortar retailers is one good way to increase an audience."

''More than free versus subscription service, what's important is the customer education issue," Laszlo said. ''It's much more of a challenge to target those people who are offline and maybe curious about what the Internet has to offer."

The Industry Standard: The End Is Near!

Y2K survivalists aren't the only ones obsessed over making it safely into next year. A recent Fortune headline asked ''Which E-Tailers Will Go 'Pop' After X-Mas?" while a Newsweek subhead wondered, ''How many will survive past Christmas?"

Newsweek's Brad Stone didn't make any predictions, but asked a few CEOs about their holiday ad strategies: Did their companies plan to advertise now and compete with the big names, or lay low and hope they're still around next Christmas?

Send.com took the aggressive approach, dropping \$20 million on radio and

TV ads, but plenty of startups hugged the sidelines. The CEO of gift registry IveBeenGood.com said, "We don't see much point in being the 20th dot-com ad that somebody sees in an hour." The CEO of women's athletic store Lucy.com agreed: "For a first-year Internet startup, trying to market yourself in the fourth quarter of 1999 is an impossible task."

Forrester Research analyst David Cooperstein tried to explain the defeatist attitude by saying these companies are "hoping to see some of their competitors fall away," presumably by blowing all their money on ads.

Fortune, not surprisingly, looked at the days after Christmas from an investor's standpoint. Analysts say most Netcos will fail, and Fortune's Patricia Sellers predicted "this Christmas will deliver the first e-shakeout." Sellers drew on the opinions of gung-ho Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodget and Morgan Stanley's Mary Meeker.

When it comes to choosing long-term e-commerce stocks, Sellers' guidelines can be summed up like this: Choose older, bigger e-shops; the more customers, the better. As in the Newsweek piece, startups ended up looking like runts, scrapping for food.

Grok wonders if, this time next year, startups will get a better shake from the media. It can't get much worse.

Remote Control for the Internet

Imagine a remote control with 40-odd buttons and a card reader that can take you to your favorite Web sites with one click or swipe. No more searching through a long list of bookmarks or having to type in a URL from memory.

PlanetPortal's eGoPad was designed on the premise that users are sick of having to remember and type in URLs or find them in disorganized lists of bookmarks.

The device offers two new ways to access Web sites. Users can push buttons on the remote for default or programmed sites. Or users can slide cards with embedded URLs into a reader on the side of the device.

About the size of a Nintendo remote, the eGoPad connects to a personal computer via a universal serial bus, commonly used to connect printers and other peripherals to the computer. Eventually it will be wireless, said Brent Kleinheksel, founder and CEO of PlanetPortal.

Internet service providers are already lining up to sign agreements to distribute eGoPads at no charge to consumers, Kleinheksel said. He anticipates seeding the U.S. market with as many as 10 million of the devices after the product is launched in late April. In the meantime, 4,000 will be tested in a beta trial set to begin Dec. 16.

It sounds spiffy, but there is reason to be skeptical. Set-top boxes and other appliances designed to ease the use of the Web haven't taken off, despite grand promises. "It's an innovative idea," but it's hard to get consumers to adopt new technologies said Charlene Li, senior analyst at Forrester Research. "These are the same users that won't even download new software on their browsers."

But Kleinheksel isn't worried. He believes many people will be attracted to eGoPad's TV remote-like interface and the fact that it doesn't cost them anything.

"This [remote] targets the late majority. Like your mother, your father. People who didn't grow up in the Internet genre, but have Internet access now and sit down at the PC and say 'Where do I go now?'" he said. "They want that initial nudge on where to go on the Internet. It gives them that warm fuzzy feeling that they're going in the right direction."

Kleinheksel also expects that the eGoPad slide cards will help U.S. consumers get over their reluctance to use cards with the Internet. Initially, PlanetPortal's slide cards will be used for direct marketing with companies distributing them to consumers for quick access to its Web site. Besides just plastering ads onto the cards, firms can also put company information on them, turning them into URL business cards for wider usage.

The cards can be distributed easily in magazines or mailed out, following the America Online ubiquitous disk model. Eventually, they can be used more like smart cards to transfer users' personal information, says Kleinheksel.

Deutsche Telekom's venture capital firm, T-Telematik Venture Holding (T-Venture), gave PlanetPortal, which is located in Research Triangle Park, N.C., its initial seed of \$1 million. T-Venture is also one of the otherwise undisclosed contributors to the company's first official round, \$8 million, which is due to close in early 2000. (The company is seeking further funding as well.) Deutsche Telekom's Internet service provider company, T-Online, also plans to distribute the devices to its more than 4 million users, according to Joerg Enge, U.S. investment manager for T-Venture.

"The sheer magnitude of the project and the scalability of the business model will open up opportunities to reach multiple target audiences in a more exciting way," said Enge. "Most important, they have identified a concept with the potential to alter a market and revolutionize how consumers connect and interact with the Internet."

Meanwhile, the eGoPad presents yet another marketing opportunity for all the dot-coms straining to stand out from the masses. Companies will pay to be default sites on the buttons, while others will have logos on buttons that are not programmable. The device can track user behavior so advertisers can target users. But Kleinheksel offers assurances that user privacy will be guaranteed and that no information will be shared without the user's approval.

For the beta, U.S. News and World Report is considering providing content for the device's four default buttons. Other companies whose sites will be included on the beta device include the following: CBS SportsLine; Thomson Investors Network; Office Depot; Priceline.com; Weather.com; Peterson's, which offers educational aids; and Giggo.com, an auto financing site. E-commerce buttons include a mix of categories from clothes to music, MP3, auction, jobs and banks. Other content buttons supply e-mail, chat, radio, a planner, stamps, community and malls.

The slide cards themselves also can bring up more buttons on the remote control. For instance, a CitySearch.com card might offer buttons for movies, tickets and food. Cards that will ship along with the beta device

will come from businesses such as The Wall Street Journal and Proxicom, an Internet consulting and development company.

The card reader will eventually find other homes. For instance, Kleinheksel says he has been approached by Southeast Asian manufacturers who want to incorporate the card reader into keyboards, which would accelerate adoption.

PlanetPortal is entering a lucrative market. The company will charge for advertising and collect fees from Web sites listed on the buttons. It also expects to make money from ISPs and other distributors who bundle the device with their software and service.

Giggo.com executives think consumers will take to the device in droves. "A lot of people are afraid of using search engines and portals because they offer too much choice," said Markus Decker, a marketing specialist at Giggo.com. The eGoPad "is a great means of navigation, taking them by the hand and guiding them through the process. The ease of use makes sense."

The branding and consumer tracking opportunities eGoPad affords are what enticed Priceline.com to sign on to the beta. "It's eye catching. It fits on a desk and could definitely take the place of a mousepad," said Brian Harniman, director of product development at Priceline.com. "It's tactile, something I like as a user."

Microsoft Aims at Internet With New Windows 2000

Microsoft Corp. Wednesday wrapped up a \$1 billion, three-year-plus project to create a professional operating system it hopes will win a big following in back shops of "dotcom" Internet companies, one software market Microsoft does not already dominate.

The new system, Windows 2000, "went gold," the company term for the gold computer disk created when a software product's coding is done. Microsoft plans to have the product in retail locations by Feb. 17, a date announced earlier.

The long-awaited operating system initially had been expected to be released sometime in 1999. Its entry into the market next year is expected to make Microsoft a stronger competitor in selling software to run the high-end computer servers that run Web sites. Windows 2000 will supersede Windows NT, which has been plagued by concerns over crashes and an inability to "scale up" for large Internet installations.

Sun Microsystems Inc., the dominant server hardware company on the Internet, uses mostly Unix-based software systems, including open systems Linux, but also sells some Windows NT-equipped computers.

Microsoft is also counting on Windows 2000 to deepen its hold on the office desktop market, even as new competitors aim to win a share of that market with rival operating systems such as Linux. Asked how much Microsoft spent developing Windows 2000, Jim Allchin, Microsoft's group vice president for platforms, said, "It's a huge number ... We are probably into a billion dollars."

The company said the new product is aimed at the professional market while

a related consumer product, known as Microsoft Millennium and using some of the same code, will be released ``sometime next year."

Microsoft, based in Redmond, Wash., said it will release the program in 16 languages in February, and in 10 more later in the year. Windows 2000 will be sold around the world through retail stores in packages and bundled into personal computers. The company said its partners were waiting with chartered planes in Seattle to fly copies of the disk to their manufacturing operations.

In briefing a group of journalists, Microsoft talked about the new operating system as the ``most reliable in company history" and it detailed the heavy amount of testing that went into the software.

The bugs of the Window's NT system are often cited by advocates of open source software such as Linux, who argue that software defects can be removed by developers who work in an open environment. But Microsoft said the reliability of Windows 2000 was assured by the 750,000 beta tests involving thousands of Microsoft customers.

While Microsoft's desktop Windows applications have been dominant, with up to 90 percent of the market, its software is not as prevalent in the back-shop operations of many ``dotcom " Internet operations, the fastest growing part of the industry.

Microsoft stock shot higher in active trading, up \$6.25 to \$104.90, as the release of the long awaited software coincided with the announcement of a large Microsoft investment in communications company Winstar Communications Inc. Microsoft stock was also active on Tuesday amid rumors, denied by government officials, that the government's anti-trust case had been settled.

Intel To Demo 1,000MHz Chip In February

Breaking the next major chip barrier, Intel Corp. plans to demonstrate a 1,000MHz Pentium III chip in February.

The Santa Clara, Calif., chipmaker will show the 1000MHz, or 1GHz, Pentium III, which is based on its current Pentium III design, code-named Coppermine, at the IEEE International Solid-State Circuits Conference on Feb. 7.

Intel first showed off a Pentium III running at about 1GHz early this year at its developer forum in Palm Springs, Calif.

While the ISSCC demonstration will be just that, a demonstration, Intel officials have said the company will offer a version of the chip at 1GHz if it is feasible. Feasibility takes into account a number of factors, such as reliability of the chip, availability or whether or not the chip would be available in sufficient numbers and the practicality of selling a 1GHz Pentium III.

If the chip were to ship, it would likely do so late in 2000.

While Pentium III would likely top out at 1GHz, Intel is planning a successor to the chip, code-named Willamette, for the end of next year. This chip, which sports a whole new 32-bit architecture, will be capable

of 1GHz and faster speeds, the company says.

The Pentium III chip will achieve the clock-rate milestone at room temperature, according to conference organizers. It will feature an optimized design that, among other things, tweaks interconnect aspect ratios, for greater performance. Interconnects are tiny pieces of wire that run between transistors inside the processor. They are measured in microns, a measurement that is 1 millionth of a meter. The Pentium III features 0.18 micron interconnects.

Compaq Computer Corp., Alpha Processor Inc. and Samsung Electronics Corp., which collaborate on the design and development of the Alpha processor, will demonstrate a version of that chip with a core frequency of 1GHz at room temperature as well.

IBM will also show a version of its Power PC chip running at 1GHz.

While the Power PC and Alpha chips will likely be found only in workstations or servers, there is a good chance that the 1GHz Pentium III could make its way into PCs.

Advanced Micro Devices Inc., which will demonstrate a version of its Athlon processor at the conference, is also gunning for the 1GHz mark.

AMD officials say it will also achieve the 1GHz mark in the second half of next year. It is not clear what clockspeed Athlon will be demonstrated at the ISSCC. AMD, however, has demonstrated 900MHz versions of the chip at room temperature, with both aluminum and copper interconnect technology. It plans to do so again during January's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, company officials said.

Jim Clark's Digital Photo Venture Launches Among A Crowd

Jim Clark's newest venture, Shutterfly.com, is scheduled to open for business Monday, offering one-stop shopping for printing digital photos via the Web.

Rival PhotoAccess.com went live last week, planning to offer "the most convenient, cost-effective way to obtain film-quality prints via the Internet," with a service similar to Shutterfly. Not to be outdone, Excite@Home and Cisco Systems are working on a stealth project called Sky Talk, with undisclosed plans to revolutionize the digital photography market.

In addition, Excite@Home today announced a partnership with Hewlett-Packard to create a Web site catering to digital photos, dubbed Excite Photo Center.

Also today, six-month old start-up Ofoto launched a site aimed at competing directly with Shutterfly, offering 100 free digital photo prints to each of its first million customers--a giveaway that could cost the company as much as \$50 million.

With decent-quality digital cameras poised to drop below \$500, the density of start-ups looking to tap the \$9 billion-a-year amateur photo market seems to be approaching the pixel count of a decent digital print. Clark and his rivals are betting that consumers will abandon the local one-hour photo store without giving up on traditional prints or turning to

high-quality desktop printers.

"Digital camera use is skyrocketing," Clark, co-founder of Silicon Graphics, Netscape Communications and Healtheon, said in a statement. "I anticipate that Shutterfly.com will revolutionize the digital photography market by combining the convenience and lower costs of digital imaging with the high quality and longevity of traditional film."

According to research firm IDC, digital camera use is set to take off, growing from sales of about 4.7 million units this year to 22 million units by 2003. Not surprisingly, the old guard doesn't quite believe the digital photo revolution will come into focus so quickly.

While Kodak has been a leader on the digital photography front, one of its executives last week said that digital technology isn't yet good enough to replace traditional photography. Carl Gustin, the company's chief marketing officer, told CNET News.com that today's digital imaging does not offer sufficient benefits to unseat photographic methods used for more than a century, whether achieved through digital cameras linked to PCs or traditional photographs processed and stored in a digital format.

"To make a new model work, the old model has to be broken," Gustin said last week. "Today, digital imaging doesn't offer anything [better] besides sharing."

Shutterfly thinks more highly of its technology. According to CEO Jayne Spiegelman, Shutterfly developed its own software to speed uploads of sizable photo files to its Web site for processing at the company's custom-designed digital printing facilities. Once on the site, customers can manipulate photos and order prints in various sizes for shipment to multiple addresses, either as regular photos or greeting cards.

Prior to the launch, the company unveiled samples of its proprietary digital printing technology, a process it says greatly enhances the quality of digital prints by, for example, removing red eye. The process was developed by Shutterfly co-founder Dan Baum, a former SGI employee who had worked with Clark in the past.

Spiegelman acknowledged some steep start-up costs but indicated the company's backers, which include Mohr Davidow Ventures, are committed to creating a company geared exclusively to the digital print market.

While Shutterfly is quick to emphasize its new technology, the company appears to have hedged its bets. Spiegelman's background is in marketing with experience at big consumer retail chains, including Circuit City and Macy's. And it can help to have someone like Clark at the helm, if just for the visibility.

Shutterfly's competition includes mature companies as well as start-ups.

Hewlett-Packard has an online photo album service, Cartogra, which allows friends and family to share pictures over the Web. And notwithstanding Gustin's comments, Kodak is working with America Online on a service called You've Got Pictures, which allows customers to post pictures on the Web when their film is processed at a photo lab. Kodak also has launched a service called PhotoNet Online through subsidiary PictureVision.

Virus Hoax Curtails Christmas Fun

As if there are not enough computer viruses, a Christmas Grinch has been spreading rumors of a virus attached to three year-end computer games.

Three shareware computer games -- ElfBowling, Frogapult, and Y2KGame -- have become the target of a virus hoax, according to anti-virus firms.

"Traditionally at Christmas you always get messages about hoaxes," said Vincent Weafer, director of Symantec Corp.'s Anti-virus Research Center. "It's almost part of a tradition now."

More than a week ago, people posting on the alt.com.virus newsgroup were concerned about the possibility that the Elfbowling game has a virus. Those worries were quickly dismissed online, but spread to the public Internet through e-mail warnings.

"The warning message seems to be spreading rapidly between companies," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for London-based Sophos Anti-Virus, in a statement. "However, all versions we have seen to date have been completely harmless and uninfected."

The text of the hoax reads:

TO ALL

IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED ANY OF THESE GAMES = FROGAPULT.EXE
ELFBOWL.EXE (FROG GAME) & (ELF BOWLING GAME)

PLEASE CAN YOU DELETE THEM COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM AS
THEY BOTH HAVE A DELAYED VIRUS ATTACHED TO THEM THAT WILL BE
ACTIVATED ON CHRISTMAS DAY AND WILL WIPE OUT YOUR SYSTEM. LET
EVERYONE KNOW OF THIS.

There is little mystery about why the three programs were targeted, said Symantec's Weafer. "All three programs send high scores and some tracking information over the Internet. People were seeing that it was connecting over the Internet, so there was some confusion about what it was doing," he said.

Weafer pointed out that such a program could easily be called a Trojan horse, even though it explains the activities in its Readme file.

While the current files being sent from friend-to-friend across the Internet are currently free from viruses, there is not guarantee that they will remain so, said Sophos' Cluley. "Although the versions of ElfBowl.exe seen by anti-virus companies to date have not been infected that does not mean the file could not become accidentally (or even deliberately) infected in future," he said in the alt.comp.virus newsgroup.

"It may be time to reconsider whether sending (or) accepting executable files willy-nilly amongst your friends and colleagues is really such a good idea."

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